



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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**U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing**

**Deteriorating Religious Freedom Conditions in Cuba**

**Wednesday June 18, 2023**

**10:30 AM-12:00PM ET**

**American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora**

**Frank Wolf, USCIRF Commissioner:**

Thank you, Vice Chair Davie, and I would like to join in welcoming everyone to today's hearing.

In our recent monitoring of religious freedom in the country, we find that the Office of Religious Affairs, or the ORA, continues to enforce a variety of restrictions on religious activity. Religious organizations in the country are required to apply to the Ministry of Justice, where the ORA is housed, for registration. Despite existing criteria, registration decisions are often arbitrary and discriminatory. Unregistered religious groups are particularly vulnerable to official harassment, as membership or association with an unregistered religious group is a crime. The ORA also exercises direct and arbitrary control over the affairs of

registered religious organizations, requiring permission for virtually any activity other than regular worship services.

The Cuban government regularly targets members of religious communities who refuse to abide by strict regulations set out by the ORA. Authorities subject pastors to detention, interrogation, threats of prison sentences on false charges, and confiscation of property. USCIRF received reports indicating that Cuban authorities detained and interrogated citizens who traveled or planned to travel to the United States in 2022, and also arbitrarily barred an imam from traveling to Mecca for the hajj.

I'd now like to pass the floor over to my fellow Commissioner, Stephen Schneck, who will highlight some cases from USCIRF's Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims List.